DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 435 163 EC 307 495

TITLE	Basics for Parents: Your Child's Evaluation.
INSTITUTION	National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	Special Education Programs (ED/OSERS), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1999-09-00
NOTE	6p.
CONTRACT	H326N980002
AVAILABLE FROM	NICHCY, P.O. Box 1492, Washington DC 20013. Tel: 800-695-0285 (Toll Free, V/TTY); Tel: 202-884-8200 (V/TTY); e-mail: nichcy @aed.org; Web site: <http://www.nichcy.org>.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Disabilities; Disability Identification; Educational Legislation; Elementary Secondary Education; *Eligibility; Evaluation Methods; Federal Legislation; *Parent Participation; Special Education; *Student Evaluation; *Student Rights; *Testing

ABSTRACT

This briefing paper reviews the special education evaluation process for children with disabilities. It discusses the purpose of an evaluation and who is involved in an evaluation. An explanation of the steps of the process includes: (1) using what is known about a child by looking at a child's school file and recent test scores; (2) collecting more information through tests, observations and opinions of professionals who have worked with the child, and using the child's medical history and parent ideas about a child's experiences, abilities, needs, and behavior; (3) deciding if a child is eligible for special education and related services; and (4) developing a child's education program. The paper explains the rights of students to an evaluation that is conducted in their native language, does not discriminate, involves trained evaluators, and uses more than one procedure. The different categories of disabilities are listed, and a list of resources for parents is provided. (CR)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 435 163

NICHCY

SEPTEMBER 1999

BASICS FOR PARENTS: YOUR CHILD'S EVALUATION

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

EC 307495

16553

National Information Center
for Children and Youth
with Disabilities

NICHCY

P.O. Box 1492
Washington, DC 20013
E-mail: nichcy@aed.org
Web: www.nichcy.org
1-800-695-0285 (V/TTY)

Basics for Parents: Your Child's Evaluation

✧ Laura's Story ✧

When Laura was 8 years old, her teacher, Mrs. Adams, saw that Laura was having a lot of trouble with reading and writing. This surprised Mrs. Adams, because Laura was very good at remembering things she heard. She asked the school to check, or evaluate, Laura to see if she had a disability.

Laura's parents had also been worried about Laura's problems. When the school asked for permission to evaluate Laura, Laura's parents said yes.

The evaluation took about one month. It involved many different things and people. The evaluation group, including Laura's parents, looked at Laura's school records and test scores. The group gave Laura more tests and talked to her. They also talked to her teacher and her parents. They watched how she did her work and learned more about where and when she has problems.

In the end, the evaluation showed that Laura has a learning disability. Now the school knows why she has trouble with reading and writing. Laura is now getting special help in school.

✧ The Purpose of Evaluation: Finding Out Why ✧

Many children have trouble in school. Some, like Laura, have trouble learning to read or write. Others have a hard time remembering new information. Still others may have trouble behaving themselves. Children can have all sorts of problems.

It's important to find out *why* a child is not doing well in school. The child may have a disability. By law, schools must provide special help to eligible children with disabilities. This help is called ***special education and related services***.

You may ask the school to evaluate your child, or the school may ask you for permission to do an evaluation. If the school thinks your child may have a disability and may need special education and related services, they must evaluate your child before providing your child with these services. *This evaluation is at no cost to you.* The evaluation will tell you and the school:

- if your child has a disability; and
- what kind of special help your child needs in school.

✧ Step 1: Using What Is Known ✧

A group of people, including you, will evaluate your child. This group will begin by looking at what is already known about your child. The group will look at your child's school file and recent test scores. You and your child's teacher may provide information to be included in this review.

The evaluation group needs enough information to decide if your child has a disability. It also needs to know what kind of special help your child needs. Is there enough information about your child to answer these questions? If your child is being evaluated for the first time, maybe not.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Our country's special education law is called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The IDEA is a very important law for children with disabilities, their families, and schools. The evaluation process described in this *Basics for Parents* is based on what this law requires.

If you want to know all the law's requirements, you may wish to request a copy of the law and its regulations. Ask NICHCY how to do this.

EC307495

✧ Step 2: Collecting More Information ✧

The group of people, including you, involved in your child's evaluation will tell the school what information it still needs about your child, and the school must collect that information.

Before the school can conduct additional testing, school personnel must ask you for permission. They must tell you what the evaluation of your child will involve. This includes describing (a) the tests they will use with your child, and (b) the other ways they will collect information about your child. Once you give your informed written permission, the school may evaluate your child to collect the additional information it needs.

Who is Involved in Your Child's Evaluation?

The group involved in your child's evaluation will include these people:

- ❒ at least one of your child's regular education teachers (if your child is, or may be, participating in the regular education environment);
- ❒ at least one of your child's special education teachers or service providers;
- ❒ a school administrator who knows about policies for special education, children with disabilities, the general curriculum (that is, the curriculum used by nondisabled children), and available resources;
- ❒ you, as parents or guardians;
- ❒ someone who can interpret the evaluation results and talk about what instruction may be necessary for your child;
- ❒ individuals (invited by you or the school) with knowledge or special expertise about your child;
- ❒ your child, if appropriate;
- ❒ representatives from other agencies that may be responsible for paying for or providing transition services (if your child is 16 years or younger, if appropriate); and
- ❒ other qualified professionals, as appropriate (such as a school psychologist, occupational therapist, speech therapist, physical therapist, medical specialist(s), or others).

The school will collect this information in many different ways and from many different people, including you if you have information you wish to share. (The people who will be involved in your child's evaluation are listed in the box to the left below.) Tests are an important part of an evaluation, but they are only a piece. The evaluation should also include:

- the observations and opinions of professionals who have worked with your child;
- your child's medical history, when it is relevant to his or her performance in school; and
- your ideas about your child's experiences, abilities, needs, and behavior in school and outside of school, and his or her feelings about school.

Professionals will observe your child. They may give your child tests. They are trying to get a picture of the "whole child." It's important that the school evaluate your child in all areas where he or she might have a disability. For example, they will want to know more about:

- how well your child speaks and understands language;
- how your child thinks and behaves;
- how well your child adapts to change;
- what your child has achieved in school;
- what your child's potential or aptitude (intelligence) is;
- how well your child functions in areas such as movement, thinking, learning, seeing, and hearing; and
- what job-related and other post-school interests and abilities your child has.

Evaluating your child completely will help you and the school decide if your child has a disability. The information will also help you and the school plan instruction for your child.

✧ Step 3: Deciding if Your Child is Eligible for Special Education ✧

The next step is to decide if your child is eligible for special education and related services. This decision will be based on the results of your child's evaluation and the policies in your area about eligibility for these special services.

It's important that your child's evaluation results be explained to you in a way that's easy to understand. In other words, it's not enough to hear about your child's scores on tests. What do those scores *mean?* Is your child doing as well as other children his or her age? What does your child do well? Where is your child having trouble? What is causing the trouble?

If you don't understand something in your child's evaluation results, be sure to speak up and ask questions. This is your child. You know your child very well. Do the results make sense, considering what you know about your child? Share your special insights. Your knowledge of your child is important.

Based on your child's evaluation results, a group of people will decide if your child is eligible for special education and related services. ***Under the IDEA, you have the right to be part of any group that decides your child's eligibility for special education and related services.*** This decision is based in part on IDEA's definition of a "child with a disability." You should know that:

- The IDEA lists 13 different disability categories (listed at the right) under which a child may be eligible for services. (To learn more about these disabilities, contact NICHCY and ask for our *Disability Fact Sheets.*)
- The disability must affect the child's educational performance.
- A child may not be identified as having a disability just because he or she speaks a language other than English and does not speak or understand English well. A child may not be identified as having a disability just because he or she has not had enough instruction in math or reading.

As a parent, you have the right to receive a copy of the evaluation report on your child. You also have the right to receive a copy of the

(continued on page 4) ➡

Four Evaluation "Musts"

- ❒ ***Using the native language:*** The evaluation must be conducted in your child's native language (for example, Spanish) or other means of communication (for example, sign language, if your child is deaf), unless it clearly isn't possible to do so.
- ❒ ***No discrimination:*** Tests must be given in a way that does not discriminate against your child because he or she has a disability or is from a different racial or cultural background.
- ❒ ***Trained evaluators:*** The people who test your child must know how to give the tests they decide to use. They must give each test according to the instructions that came with the test.
- ❒ ***More than one procedure:*** Evaluation results will be used to decide if your child is a "child with a disability" and to determine what kind of educational program your child needs. These decisions cannot be made based on only one procedure such as only one test.

IDEA's Categories of Disability

- Autism
- Deaf-blindness
- Deafness
- Hearing impairment
- Mental retardation
- Multiple disabilities
- Orthopedic impairment
- Other health impairment (i.e., having limited strength, vitality, or alertness that affects a child's educational performance)
- Serious emotional disturbance
- Specific learning disability
- Speech or language impairment
- Traumatic brain injury
- Visual impairment, including blindness

paperwork about your child's eligibility for special education and related services.

If your child is eligible for special education and related services (such as speech therapy), then you and the school will meet and talk about your child's special educational needs (see Step 4 below).

If your child is not eligible for special education and related services, the school must tell you so in writing. You must also receive information about what to do if you disagree with this decision. If this information is not in the materials the school gives you, ask for it. You have the right to disagree with the eligibility decision and be heard. Also ask how the school will help your child if he or she will not be getting special education services.

◇ Step 4: Developing Your Child's Educational Program ◇

If, however, your child is found eligible for special education and related services, the next step is to write an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for your child. This is a written document that you and school personnel develop together. The IEP will describe your child's educational program, including the special services your child will receive.

◇ Organizations That Can Help ◇

There's a lot to know about disabilities, special education, and parenting a child with a disability. Here are some people who can help you with your questions and concerns.

- ***NICHCY*** offers many useful publications. Our information specialists are also available to talk with you personally. See the top of page 1 for all our contact information.
- Your state's ***Parent Training and Information (PTI) Center*** serves parents just like you. Your PTI can answer questions about special education, help you work with the school, and put you in touch with parent groups near your home. Call NICHCY to find out how to get in touch with your PTI, or see our *State Resource Sheet* for your state. The PTI is listed there.
- The ***special education director*** in your school or district can tell you about local special education guidelines. Call the school or your local district office, and ask to speak to the person in charge of special education.
- The ***State Director of Special Education*** in your state can tell you about state policies. This person's name is listed on NICHCY's *State Resource Sheet*.

Four Steps in Evaluation

Your child is having trouble in school. Someone notices, maybe you, maybe a teacher. You both want your child to do well in school. The first step is to evaluate your child to find out what is causing your child to have problems.

❒***Step 1: Using what's already known***
The group of people (which must include you) evaluating your child looks at what information is already available about your child. Does the group need more? If so, the school must collect it.

❒***Step 2: Collecting more information***
The school asks for your permission to evaluate your child. You give informed written permission. The school then collects more information about your child.

❒***Step 3: Deciding your child's eligibility***
Is your child eligible for special education and related services? Based on the evaluation results, the group of school professionals and you, the parents, decide.

❒***Step 4: Developing your child's educational program***
If your child is eligible, you and the school will develop an educational program to meet your child's needs.

Publication of this document is made possible through Cooperative Agreement #H326N980002 between the Academy for Educational Development and the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. ***This publication is copyright free.*** Readers are encouraged to copy and share it, but please credit the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY).

IDEAs that Work
Office of Special Education Programs